

The Final Task

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Summary: The end draws ever closer, as Virusi continues with his creator's plan... Can he be stopped?

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: I Killed Tama

AN: And so we come to the second part of the finale, and the penultimate story of *The Lion King Adventures*. Things are getting quite tense, are they not? Especially with only one more story to go after this. Last time, we saw Virusi kill the Hermit of Hekima, and extract a peculiar orb from his chest. We also saw Haiba tell Simba and Nala the truth about Tama's death. What could possibly happen next? Well, let's find out!

The Final Task

Chapter One: I Killed Tama

I killed Tama.

Haiba repeated those three words—which were dripping with guilt and regret—over and over again in his head. At that moment, it was as if he had forgotten that he made the decision to turn his life around after killing her. The sadness came rushing straight back into him, and he was suddenly back in that deep, dark cave. Cold and alone.

But he wasn't in that cave. He was facing his friends. Simba and Nala. Time seemed to stop. All he could see were their cold stares. Burning into his soul. The truth really did hurt. But his days of lying were over now. He had to face up to his actions, no matter what the consequences may be.

"You killed Tama?"

Nala was the first to speak, her mouth hanging open slightly in disbelief. Her gaze never left Haiba. She knew the truth; she could see the honesty in his eyes. She just didn't want to believe it.

Simba's eyes narrowed in fury. Haiba didn't even have to count to three before the cub's claws were pressed to his throat.

"Why did you lie to us?" Simba demanded, ready to slit his throat wide open. "*Why?*"

Haiba said nothing. He felt paralysed with fear, unable to even gag.

Simba dug his claws into Haiba's skin, viciously securing him to the ground. He cried out in agony, but Simba didn't let go.

"You liar," Simba spat, and began to slash Haiba across the face with his claws. "*You liar!*"

Haiba couldn't fight back as the flesh on his cheek was torn open; a stinging pain instantly crept into his body. His vision became blurry as Simba attacked again and again and again, showing no signs of stopping. He could feel his world slipping away...

"Simba, stop it!" Nala grabbed Simba and pulled him off of Haiba before he could do any serious harm. "You're going to kill him!"

"He doesn't deserve to live!" Simba yelled, snapping his teeth at Nala and trying to break free of her grasp. But she held him steady; she was much stronger than she looked. "Look at that little rat!" He pointed at him with a claw. "How can you trust a creep like him?"

Haiba managed to wearily raise himself into a sitting position. He spat blood from his mouth, staring up at Simba with an uncountable amount of anger. Three deep, gory claw marks had been engraved into his left cheek. They wouldn't heal for a very long, long time. And the scars would be permanent.

"Leave him alone," Nala ordered, holding Simba still. "If you kill him, then I'll never forgive you. He's our friend."

"Our *friend*?" Simba exclaimed. "He's a murderer! If I were the King, then I'd have him executed on the spot!"

"But you're *not* the King, are you?" Nala retorted. "For years, you've kept on bragging about how 'high and mighty' you'll become. Face it, Simba: you won't rule anything in a million years. So, shut up!"

Simba tore away from Nala, standing his ground and just about resisting the urge to cut Haiba's throat open in defiance of her. "I can't believe you're defending him," he snarled. "Do you love him? Is that it? Am I not good enough for you?"

"I'm not in love with anyone," Nala snapped over her shoulder, walking over to Haiba. "Are you okay?"

Haiba said nothing. He only nodded, signalling to Nala that he was at least conscious. He used a paw to wipe away some blood that was dribbling from his nose. He looked in a bad shape, having sustained more injuries from Simba than he had from any other enemy they'd ever encountered. It was the worst Nala had ever seen him.

The Interceptor—who had been there the whole time—was mingling nervously in the background, not particularly wanting to immerse himself in the situation. This was something that the three cubs had to figure out on their own. He had a feeling that things weren't going to end well for Haiba, however...

"He'd better answer me," Simba threatened, extending his claws. "I want to know why he did it."

Nala tried her best to ignore Simba, placing her forepaws on Haiba's shoulders and forcing him to stare at her. "Don't look at him. Look at me. Why did you do it, Haiba? Is it the truth?"

She was gentle with him; it was obvious that murdering Tama wasn't something that Haiba had particularly enjoyed. There had to be a certain reason for it. Hurting him wasn't going to help at all. Simba was being completely idiotic in his approach of Haiba's revelation.

Haiba nodded, blood still trickling from the deep wounds on his cheek. "It's the truth," he murmured, avoiding her gaze. It was quite apparent to Nala that he was absolutely ashamed of his actions. Honestly, she wasn't surprised in the slightest that he had lied to them. "I did it. I killed her. I killed her..." Tears began to flow from his eyes, thick and fast.

"But... *why*?" Nala asked. That was the part that confused her the most. "Why did you kill her, Haiba? What did Tama do to you?"

"She... she blackmailed me," Haiba confessed, causing Simba to roll his eyes and look disgusted.

"He's lying," Simba interjected. "It's obvious. He's been lying to us for days! Why stop now? It's just an excuse!"

Nala ignored him. "Blackmailed you?" she said to Haiba. "What do you mean?"

"After Tojo died," Haiba explained, "she was lonely. She wanted someone to comfort her. To *love* her. Physically, I mean. That's why she chose me. She just wanted someone to kiss. Someone to touch. At first, I gave in..."

He bowed his head, reliving the grisly scene once more. "But then she took it too far. She said that... she said that she wanted to start a family. Have cubs. Do the things that she was going to do with Tojo. I know—at that age, it sounds crazy. But she'd lost her mind by that point."

I don't believe it, Nala thought. She knew that Tama was extremely distressed by the death of Tojo, but blackmailing Haiba sounded so extreme for her. Clearly her mind must have been warped to an irreparable degree... It sounded like uncontrollable insanity.

"So what happened then?" Nala asked softly, although she could pretty much imagine what had transpired after Tama expressed her interest in having cubs with him. "What did you do?"

"I said no," Haiba replied. "I told her that I didn't want to. And then she attacked me. She said that she was going to kill me. So I decided to get rid of her. I grabbed Tama and smashed her head into a rock. Again and again and again until she stopped breathing."

"It was self defence," Nala said, trying to justify his actions. If Tama was going to murder him, then he had a valid reason to fight back. Kill or be killed, as Simba would say. It wasn't as though Haiba *wanted* to kill her. "You had no choice."

"But I did," Haiba said, looking into her teal eyes now. "Of course I did. I could have done anything. I could have startled her by pushing her into a river. I could have hit her once on the head and knocked her out. But I didn't." He shook his head. "I made the choice to kill her. I just kept smashing and smashing her skull into that rock, no matter how much she begged or screamed. *And it felt so good.*"

Nala felt a cold shiver run down her spine as Haiba finished his story. She looked just about as traumatised as he did. In a way, he was right. He could have done something else. And yet, he decided to end Tama's life. Probably for the best—considering she was so mentally damaged—but it was still wrong. There was no denying that.

"That's it." Simba took a step towards Haiba, ready to close in for the kill with his claws. "He's told his story. He has to be punished. Who knows what else he might do?"

"You're no different," Haiba said, looking at Simba now.

Simba's eyes were burning with fury. "What did you just say to me?" he demanded.

"I said that you aren't any different," Haiba replied, clearly and concisely. "You're a killer. More than me, Simba. It's all you do. Think of all the lives you've taken. All of those animals and creatures. I'm sorry for what I've done. You take pride in it. You're far worse than any of the monsters you've defeated. Think about that, for once."

"I kill anyone who gets in my way," Simba declared. "They're the evil ones. *Not* me. You murdered one of your own friends. While Nala may forgive you, I certainly won't."

"Listen," Nala said, taking authority over the group. If anyone was going to decide what Haiba's fate would be, then it was her. She wasn't just going to let Simba tear him to shreds. That would make her evil, too—and she wasn't going to give in to her dark side ever again. It had already happened once before; she wouldn't make the same mistake twice.

"Simba, if you kill Haiba, then you're just as bad as he is," Nala told him. "He's our friend. We love him. What he did was wrong. I *know* it's wrong. But... he took a big step forwards in telling us the truth. It takes a lot of courage to admit something like that. I know that he can change. He feels sorry for what he's done. Of course he does—just *look* at him! We just have to give him a chance. He's already given you one."

Simba was suddenly reminded of all the deaths he'd caused recently, feeling a slight pang of guilt. Haiba had never really complained about his murderous actions before. He always just let him get on with things.

Simba then shook his head, forcing the thoughts out of his head. Guilt was for the weak. "Fine," he said. "But I'm leaving you in charge of him. If he causes any more trouble, then he's dead. Got it?"

Nala nodded. "Yeah. I get you." She watched as Haiba weakly climbed to his paws. "Can you move?"

"I'll be fine," Haiba assured her, and proceeded to cough up a mouthful of blood. "I'm not gonna die anytime soon."

Nala winced at the sight of the bloody mess his face had become. "I'm sorry about that," she told him.

"You don't have to be sorry," Haiba said, brushing off the incident as if it were nothing. "It's not your fault. In a way, I deserve it."

"No, you don't," Nala said. "What you did was wrong—I admit that—but it doesn't mean that you deserve more pain. I might have done the same thing myself if I were in your position. What matters is that you're sorry. You have to forgive yourself, Haiba. There's nothing else you can do."

Haiba said nothing. He seemed to lose himself in his thoughts. Nala sighed, feeling sorry for him. It was such a difficult issue. She just hoped that she had handled it in the correct way. Haiba didn't deserve to die. Despite his wrongdoings, there were so many good things that he had done for them all. He was a good animal. One of the purest she'd ever met. Certainly more noble than Simba, that was for sure.

"You okay now?" asked the Interceptor, as the three cubs wandered over to him. He was tempted to make some sort of sly comment concerning Haiba's facial injuries, but he decided against it.

"Yeah," Simba said, instantly taking charge. "If the Hermit of Hekima is dead, then that means the virus obviously got what he wanted from him. We need to find out what it was and what his creator is planning."

"So we have to find him," Nala decided. "Before anything gets worse. There's no telling what he's planning on doing."

"I'd like to know who his creator is," Simba said. "He likes to keep that to himself, for some reason."

"I think I know already," said Nala, looking particularly concerned. "Death came back once before. He can do it again."

Chapter 2: Chapter 2: The Orb

Chapter Two: The Orb

Virusi was winning.

Despite being born only twelve hours ago, Virusi had already achieved quite a lot in his life. He had washed up on a riverbank in the Wet Lands: a kingdom that stored a substantial amount of water in its rivers. After killing two lions there with his deadly claw—which could cut through anything and boil someone's cells until they combusted into flames—he quickly set about putting his creator's plan into action.

Two objectives had been planted inside his brain from the moment he had been born. The first was to kill Simba, Nala and Haiba. Virusi knew that they were the most dangerous animals in the jungle, and the only ones who stood a chance of halting his creator's plan. They had to be eliminated before they could cause any serious harm.

The second objective was to find the Hermit of Hekima and bring back the Pride Lands. Virusi had opted to do this first, since the cubs were being irritatingly evasive with him. The fact that an annoying lion called the Interceptor was accompanying them just made things even worse. Taking out the hermit would be a much simpler—and sweeter—operation to execute.

And kill him he did. His claw made its fatal mark by puncturing his chest—smashing through the golden eagle's ribs—and extracting the secret that he had been hiding for such a long time now.

That secret now resided on the tip of Virusi's claw.

It was a glowing blue orb of pure energy. Any other animal would have found the sight of the thing to be incredibly confusing. But Virusi was neither an animal nor a creature; he was a living virus with an extensive array of knowledge. Born and bred to assassinate his creator's greatest enemies and execute his plan.

The orb was of the utmost importance if his creator's plan were to succeed. The Hermit of Hekima was the most powerful magical being in the jungle—possibly even the world—so it was only natural that he had all the answers. He just didn't like to speak of them.

"As soon as I'm done with this, those cubs are gonna burn," Virusi said, striding through the jungle at a moderate pace. "And that Interceptor character, too."

The living virus had grown a lust for revenge after his encounter with both the cubs and the Interceptor. They had humiliated him by escaping his deadly talents. They could be running around anywhere now, coming up with one of their typical sneaky plans to try and outsmart him. Their continued existence was a threat to his creator's plan... He couldn't allow future events to become jeopardised. They had to die, sooner or later.

Many obstacles—including branches and bushes—blocked his path, but the extraordinary heat powers that his claw possessed allowed him to cut them down without breaking so much as a drop of sweat. He smiled at the mental image of his mortal talon plunging right into the hearts of those despicable brats...

Virusi examined the bright blue orb impaled on the end of his claw, sensing the immeasurable power that it possessed. *Good thing that eagle's dead*, he thought, replaying the memory of the Hermit of Hekima plummeting like a heavy stone into the water. That was his grave now. *He could have become a very serious problem later on...*

There were very few opposing animals to Virusi that remained. Just Simba, Nala, Haiba and the Interceptor. They could be dealt with after he was finished with more important matters. Anyone else who prevented him from completing his mission would similarly be destroyed. The living virus was a stubborn force that would not be messed with.

Virusi reduced a large bush to ashes and escaped from the jungle, finding himself facing a dry expanse of land that was dotted with randomly placed bushes. The ground seemed to end about twenty feet away. All that could be seen beyond was a massive pit of nothingness that appeared to be absolutely endless.

Only animals with decent geographical knowledge would know that this hole was once filled with the massive kingdom called the Pride Lands. Nothing remained of the land now, though. Just the eternal void.

"Big," Virusi commented, letting out a low whistle at the impressive sight of the hole. "Very big."

The sky was lit a very dim orange colour, signalling that the arrival of night was imminent. The moon was practically up already. It wouldn't be long before everything was completely engulfed by darkness.

That suited Virusi just fine.

As he traversed the dry land, the living virus noticed something lying in a heap on the ground just a few feet away from him. "What is *that*?" he wondered curiously, taking a slight turn to the left in order to investigate further.

The foul odour of decaying meat invaded his nostrils, causing him to wince slightly in repulsion. Despite being a living virus, he did have standards. He preferred to eradicate all traces of his victims rather than leaving the bodies to fester for the buzzards.

A couple of bodies were lying on the ground in front of him. A male and a female cub, Virusi could tell. Chunks of flesh had been torn away from their skeletons by buzzards, revealing bone underneath. Their eyeballs and tongues had also been pecked out, leaving them as just husks of their former selves. The living virus could detect scorch marks all over their bodies, too. It was as if they had been shocked to death...

Frowning, Virusi used his claw to puncture the cubs' chests. It wasn't long before their dead flesh erupted and sizzled, bursting and boiling until they became nothing more than flames, which died out in a matter of seconds. The stench of wasted life was soon extinguished, and no trace remained of the cubs once known as Mjanja and Tuhuma.

"This world was sick before I even got here," Virusi commented, before walking over the space where the corpses once resided. It only took him a minute to reach the edge of the crater, and he stared down into its gaping maw. The darkness below was overwhelming. It was bleaker than a starless night. "Now, *that's* something."

The blue orb had been unaffected by Virusi's use of his razor sharp claw. He easily extracted it from the end with his slightly smaller claws, holding it up to one of his eyes. "Perfect," he said, and held the orb of pure energy over the source of unlimited darkness. "Things are gonna get a whole lot more interesting."

Virusi released the blue orb from his grip, allowing it to drop deep down into the darkness of the Pride Lands crater. It only took a few seconds for the vibrant blue light to be swallowed up by the void.

All that followed was silence.

Virusi was still grinning, however. He was patient. He knew that it would only be a matter of seconds before his actions began to take effect.

The sound of an explosion could be heard at the bottom of the crater, causing a bright blue flash to scatter across the diameter of the hole. A mixture of whooshing and crackling noises followed, as arcs of pure blue energy shot up into the sky, setting it alight with magic.

Virusi tossed back his head and threw his forepaws up in the air, laughing victoriously at the top of his voice as the magic began its work. The arcs of energy were increasing in volume and intensity, swirling throughout the enormous hole.

Something was returning.

"Okay, where do you think we'll find Simba?" Sarafina asked, slipping the unconscious Ugaidi onto her back like a comfortable item of clothing. "We have to tell him about this before it's too late."

Sarafina and Zazu had been having an adventure of their own since Simba and the others had disappeared. Ugaidi was acting a lot weirder than usual, seeming more terrified than ever before. This was concerning for Sarafina, who had sensed something ominous in the atmosphere prior to encountering the frightened cub. She felt that something was definitely going on. Something evil and destructive. Something that could affect the whole entire world.

Something that could spell the end for them all.

"I have no idea where to find him," Zazu said. The hornbill hadn't been very helpful in Sarafina's investigation; he seemed adamant that nothing at all was going to happen. She knew very well that he was just afraid. He'd already lost someone he loved—a female hornbill called Pori—once before. He didn't want that to happen again. "He comes and goes as he pleases. You know that."

"Ugh!" Sarafina rolled her eyes in frustration. "I wish Ugaidi had started acting up when he was here earlier."

"He's always acting up, anyway," Zazu replied. "I still believe that this is only his insanity becoming progressively worse."

"Zazu, you know as well as I do that something is going on," Sarafina said. "I can feel it in my heart. Now, come on—we'll

just have to search the jungle until we find him. Otherwise things are going to get worse. *Much* worse."

Sarafina headed off at a quick pace, going as fast as she could without dislodging Ugaidi from her back. The cub seemed to be able to predict the future; there was no telling what he might foresee next. It was important that she brought him along with them. The information could be inordinately helpful.

"Wait for me, Sarafina!" Zazu called, flying after her. "Oh, I don't like this. I don't like it *at all*!"

AN: Hmm... so Haiba lives. For now. Surprised? I assume that you all thought Simba might just claw him to pieces. Well, he probably would have if Nala didn't restrain him. Plus, the mystery of that orb still remains... What has Virusi done with it? We'll have to find out at a later point. See you tomorrow for two more chapters!

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: The Reborn Kingdom

AN: Still a lot of speculation going on concerning this finale. There'll be a little bit more revealed in these next two chapters, as always. Did you know that there are only six updates from me remaining? We're careening towards the end at quite a pace. Seriously, it's gone by so fast for me. I wish it'd drag on for a bit. Oh, well.

Haradion: Well, I was never thinking about *The End of Time* when I wrote this. That wasn't what I was going for. This story is completely of my own creation. It'd be a disgrace if I stole another plot for my final ever fan fiction story, wouldn't it?

anonymous13: Yes. My evil plan all along was to steal the title and premise of your novel so I could use it for my own purposes. Why would I do that? I've got my own books to write. If I did do it, then you know exactly who to sue. You would need an account to message me, if that's what you're looking for. You don't have to disclose any personal information. I'm surprised you don't have an account already, seeing as you're such a common reviewer.

Chapter Three: The Reborn Kingdom

The atmosphere was unbelievably tense as Simba, Nala, Haiba and the Interceptor returned to Jowai Resort. If they had arrived five minutes earlier, then they would have bumped into Sarafina and Zazu, who were on their way out. Sadly, they had just missed them, resulting in the resort being completely empty when they arrived.

"Sarafina? Zazu?" Simba called, but got no response. "Where the heck are they? They should be here."

"It's night already," Nala said, looking around worriedly. "My mom wouldn't leave the resort at this hour. Where is she?"

"I think we have more important things to worry about than where your mother is," the Interceptor said. "That virus thing is probably going to rip the earth apart if we don't do something about it. I'll die. And that's just a crime."

"Oh, yeah," Simba agreed sarcastically. "A world without the Interceptor is a very sad world indeed. I think you should own up to the fact that you're not the centre of attention. No one is going to care if you die or not."

"Just shut up and think of something," the Interceptor snapped. "You don't want to die as much as I don't want to die. You're the one who's supposed to come up with all the plans. Come on! Let's hear one!"

"I can't come up with a plan if I don't know what he's doing," Simba said, clearly sounding frustrated by the situation. "I don't know what happened when he saw the Hermit of Hekima. I don't even know how he killed him. It's a mystery."

"Then work it out!" the Interceptor yelled.

"Stop it, you two," Nala interjected, standing between them. "This isn't helping."

Again, she found herself trying to keep the group together. She was the only one who hadn't changed since the Pride Lands had been destroyed. She'd been through some tough times, but it didn't alter her personality. She just wanted to stay the way she was. The problem was that everyone else seemed to be changing around her...

"Well, maybe he should stop being so awkward," Simba said, gesturing to the Interceptor with a paw. "Maybe he should help us instead of yelling all the time!"

"I'm not yelling!" the Interceptor yelled. "I just want something to be done about this virus! Before he burns us all to death!"

"So, how do you stop a virus?" Nala wondered.

Haiba finally spoke up; he hadn't uttered a word since telling Simba and Nala the story of how he had murdered Tama in cold blood. He had been lost in his thoughts, pondering on whether telling the truth was the correct thing to do. Granted, his life had been spared—but now Simba despised him, and he was left with permanent scars. They would never heal. A constant reminder of his actions had been burned into his flesh. Now, every time he stared at his reflection, he would be instantly reminded of the night when he caved Tama's head in. He was forever cursed.

"How do you think you stop a virus?" he said, looking up at Nala. "Drinking fresh water and resting? No. You have to use his own abilities against him. Burn him—until nothing at all remains. That's the way to do it."

"You stay out of this," Simba snarled. "I don't want to hear your voice again—or you'll be very sorry." He brandished his claws at Haiba, just to get the point across.

Haiba stared at him with contempt; he hated Simba for what he had done to him. That vicious little cub had scarred him

—literally—for life. Was he so evil that he attacked his own friends? He could sort of understand Simba's reaction, given the fact that he had confessed to murdering Tama. However, the old Simba never would have reacted in such a way. He would have listened—just like Nala did—with compassion and concern. Anything good that Haiba once saw in Simba was now long since dead. He truly was a monster.

"Simba, he's not a slave," Nala said, defending Haiba. "He can speak if he wants to."

"He's a murderer," Simba said. "He should be dead already."

"He has a point," Nala stressed. "Maybe if we can destroy this virus, then we stand a chance of stopping his creator's plan."

"Death," Simba muttered. He was the villain who they thought to be responsible for all of this. It seemed like just the type of diabolical plan he would conjure up in order to destroy them all and take over the entire world. "Could it be him?"

"I said he could come back," Nala told him, fully believing that Death was somehow involved in this. It was only typical for him to manipulate things from the shadows. He had done it once before, causing a countless number of troubles before finally showing himself to the world. The battle that ensued was a close call. His extremely destructive powers had very nearly killed them all. "It's not impossible."

"I know," Simba was reluctant to agree. "That's what I'm afraid of." Along with the Vimelea, Death was the greatest threat they had ever faced. The master of all evil, bringing total chaos and destruction. He was a formidable force before. They dreaded to think how powerful he could be this time...

"He could rip apart the whole world," Nala said concernedly. "Everyone will die. *Everyone*."

"Then you know what we have to do," Haiba said softly, avoiding Simba's hard stare. "We have to kill that virus."

Simba straightened himself up. "Then we'd better start looking," he said. "That thing could be anywhere in this massive jungle—"

He was interrupted by a deafening noise that sounded like an explosion of some kind. The four of them looked to the skies as blue arcs of magical energy crackled and danced across the night. They gave off an ominous feeling... This was no light show. This was something deadly.

"What is it?" Nala shouted over the noise. "I've never seen anything like this before!" Her eyes boggled at the sight.

"That's because it isn't natural," Simba responded, listening to the explosive noise. "It sounds like it's coming from..."

Simba, Nala, Haiba and the Interceptor all turned their heads in the direction of the alarming sound, looks of realisation on each of their faces.

"The Pride Lands," Simba finished.

Virusi was still laughing as the magical energy swooped and dived through the mammoth crater, seeing that its work was nearing completion.

He watched as the energy began to take on a shape. Forming outlines of cliffs and fields and rivers, constructing something totally new with its amazing powers. The explosive noises soon began to die down, quietening as the surroundings of a familiar kingdom began to fade into view.

A bright flash of blue light flared into existence, obscuring everything from view. Including the gigantic crevice in the earth.

The living virus shielded his eyes with a paw, as the blinding light slowly dissolved into nothingness, giving way to something new.

Virusi grinned at the sight of the fresh green grass that was laid out before him. The sound of clean drinking water flowing from a nearby stream could be heard. And far out in the distance, a very famous rock structure could be seen...

At long last, the Pride Lands had been restored.

Virusi stepped into the land—the first being to walk on the reborn kingdom—and smiled. Swirls of blue magical energy surrounding random parts of the kingdom died out, as the resurrection was complete.

"It's as if it's never been gone," the living virus laughed. He touched the trunk of a tree beside him, careful not to reduce it

to ash with his contagious claw. "He's going to be very happy with this. Very happy..."

"Simba, what are you doing?" Nala called, trying to keep up with him as best as she could. "Where are you taking us?"

"Where do you think?" he retorted over his shoulder. He didn't slow his pace one bit. "The Pride Lands!"

"He said he was going to bring the place back," said the Interceptor, thinking back to their encounter with Virusi. That was what he needed the Hermit of Hekima for. Answers. Once he got those answers, the Interceptor assumed that the golden eagle would be of no use to Virusi anymore... That was why he was dead now, rotting away in a watery grave.

"He's using magic," Simba said, looking up at the sky. The energy had disappeared only a few minutes after they first saw it. The noise had stopped, too. Whatever Virusi was doing, he seemed to be finished with it. "He *has* to be."

"This is getting more confusing by the second," Haiba muttered, looking at Nala as he ran alongside her. "What would Death—if he really *is* behind this—want with the Pride Lands? Last time, he wanted to cause chaos throughout the kingdom. Now he wants to bring it back?"

"I don't know," Nala said. "Maybe we'll find out once we get there."

It took them about fifteen minutes, but the trees of the jungle finally opened out onto where the giant crater was supposed to be.

Only, it wasn't there anymore.

"Wow..." Simba's mouth dropped open in amazement as the sight. It was something he had only ever dreamed of for the past few months. He never thought for a second that he would ever see it again.

"I don't believe it," Nala said, stunned to the core. She never thought that it would happen. Not in a million years.

"It's incredible," said Haiba, more than impressed. All this time—all that misery—and finally their goal was right there in front of them.

The Pride Lands. Clear as crystal, and fully restored. It was like the kingdom had never even been destroyed. It looked just as perfect as it always had. Their home. This was where they truly belonged. Not that resort.

"It's real," Simba gasped, stumbling forward. He stared excitedly at the beautiful trees and lush fields; he'd never been so pleased to see them before. "It's actually *real*!"

"We have our home back." Nala found it hard to believe that she was uttering those five words. It was like a dream come true. "We did it."

"I don't know," the Interceptor said, narrowing his eyes in suspicion. "Something's not right here..."

"What are you talking about?" Simba replied, smiling, blinded by joy. "It's the Pride Lands!"

He reached out with one of his forepaws, ready to step onto the fresh grass of their reinstated home—

—but his paw never touched the ground.

"Huh?" Simba's forepaw was pressed against what appeared to be an invisible wall, separating him from the kingdom. "What?"

He pressed as hard as he could, straining his muscles in order to try and break through the barrier. "No!" The ecstatic look on his face devolved into one of despair. "*No, no, no, no, no!*" He whacked against the invisible force field again and again, to no avail.

They were still cut off from their home.

"I thought so," the Interceptor said, looking disgusted at such a trick. "Obviously, he's used that magic to prevent us from getting in."

"That's impossible!" Simba cried, looking on the verge of tears. He sighed, bowing his head in defeat. "Even when my dream is right in front of my face, I still can't reach it. It's over... all over..."

"Simba, it's not over," Nala said. "We can still stop that virus and get into the kingdom."

"Don't you get it?" Simba snapped, whipping round to face her. "He's *in* the kingdom! This is to keep us out! He could be doing anything in there! I bet he's talking to Death right now, plotting on how they're both going to destroy the world together! We're powerless out here, Nala! We're weak! All of us are weak!"

"Don't say that!" Nala said. "We can think of something!"

"Like what?" Simba roared. "You can't think of anything!"

"I have an idea," Haiba said, meekly raising a paw.

Simba looked outraged to hear Haiba speak. He was staring at him like he was ready to kill him. "You won't have anything to do with this! You've wrecked enough already!"

"What's your idea?" Nala asked, curious.

"We have to go back to the jungle," Haiba said. "And we're gonna need some help."

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: The Idea

Chapter Four: The Idea

"I'm not listening to him," Simba said, upon hearing Haiba's suggestion. Out of the group, he hated Haiba more than anyone else. He was even worse than the Interceptor. How could that little creep lie to them like that? He'd deceived them by saying that he avenged Tama's death, when he was actually the cause of it. Haiba had made a disgrace of Tama's life, and had betrayed them all. "He shouldn't even be alive right now."

"We said we would give him a chance," Nala said, facing Simba now. "You can't just hold a grudge against him!"

"I can do what I like," Simba snapped. "He's a murderer. Plain and simple. He's killed one of our own friends, and you're okay with that? What if he killed you? Would you have forgiven him *then*?"

"That's not the point," Nala retorted. "Haiba isn't exactly a serial killer. He's not going to go around killing other animals. It was stupid and pointless, what happened—but we can't change the past. No one can."

"I wish I could," Simba muttered. "I would have killed him before he had the chance to smash Tama's skull in. Actually, scratch that—I would have killed the Vimelea before they could destroy the Pride Lands."

"Well, the kingdom is back now," Nala said, gesturing with a paw to the newly restored Pride Lands. "We just need to find a way to get through that invisible wall or whatever the heck it is that's stopping us from entering the kingdom. Would it really hurt to listen to Haiba, Simba? I haven't seen you come up with anything. You just keep yelling."

Simba sat down on the ground, surrendering to her. "Fine," he said. "Come on. Let's hear what his great idea is."

"Haiba, just tell us," Nala said, looking at him. He didn't seem surprised in the slightest by Simba's reaction towards him speaking. He knew that Simba couldn't care less if he fell from a very tall cliff and was mauled to pieces by thirty hyenas. Haiba was probably better off dead to him, anyway. Less baggage to carry.

"I think I know how we can get into the kingdom," Haiba said. "But we're going to need Hago's staff."

Simba and Nala exchanged confused glances with one another.

"Hago's staff?" said Nala, raising an eyebrow in confusion.

Unlike some other animals, Hago wasn't born magical. Jealous of his family's talents, he had his brother, Bora, construct a magical staff that granted him powers beyond his wildest dreams. He was able to do practically anything and everything with it. Simba and Nala had lost count of how many times they had been subjected to the staff's unlimited supply of magic...

"What the hell would you need *that* for?" Simba demanded. "You know what happened to it."

Haiba knew all too well what became of Hago's staff. While Tama never disclosed what had happened between her and Tojo, the cubs were more than sure that she had killed him. She had taken Hago's staff from Tojo—who had been seduced by its powers—and plunged it right into his chest. He was dead within seconds. It wasn't until they discovered Tama crying next to Tojo's body that they learned of his untimely fate...

"Of course I know," Haiba said. "But his staff is magical. If we can find it, we can use it to get through that invisible wall."

"Fight magic with magic..." Nala said to herself, impressed. "That's a pretty good idea, Haiba. Sounds like it could work."

"Well, we know where the staff is, don't we?" Simba remarked. "Sticking out of Tojo's chest."

Nala grimaced in disgust, memories of Tojo's mangled body returning to her. She could smell the decaying, putrid flesh; she was staring into his soulless, empty eye sockets... It made her want to be sick. "Please don't remind me of that."

"A staff?" asked the Interceptor, narrowing his eyes. "Sticking out of his chest?"

Simba nodded. "Yeah. It's been that way for ages now." It felt like such a long time since Tojo's death... They had since moved on. The dead had no importance to him now. He had almost completely forgotten about Tojo.

"I've seen him," the Interceptor confirmed, much to their surprise. "Not too long before I ran into that virus."

"Was that staff still there?" Haiba asked hopefully.

"Uh... yeah," the Interceptor replied, suddenly looking quite nervous. "I might have accidentally thrown it into a bush, though."

"You took it out of his chest?" Nala exclaimed, horrified that the Interceptor would deface Tojo's body in such a way. "How could you?"

"Hey, he looks better without it in," the Interceptor said. "Whoever he was. Besides, all that's left now is a skeleton. The buzzards have been at him."

Nala shuddered at the thought. When she died, she hoped that she would be buried straightaway; the thought of buzzards pecking out portions of her rotting flesh made her stomach turn over in disgust.

"How can you *accidentally* throw it into a bush?" Simba asked.

"It slipped from my grasp," the Interceptor lied with a shrug, neglecting to mention that he had discarded Hago's staff because he thought it was a useless object of no value. "There's no magic in it, anyway."

"And how would you know?" Simba challenged, stepping towards the hunter. "Your knowledge of magical lions can't be that extensive. What are you hiding from us, huh? Are you magical, Interceptor? Is that it?"

"You're crazy," the Interceptor said. "I don't waste my time prancing around blasting pretty fairy lights at other animals. I've got better things to do with my time! I could just tell that it was useless, okay? It felt hollow. Completely empty. Don't you think something with a little bit of power would have some weight to it?"

"Can you remember where you left it?" Simba asked. "I didn't really have time to memorise where Tojo's body was the last time I saw it. I was thinking about other things." Or, to be more specific, he was caught up in the sneaky coils of a slithery snake called Nyoka... That was where Simba had gained his first taste for blood. Needless to say, that python wasn't going to be bothering him ever again...

"Yeah," the Interceptor said. "I can take you right to it. It was only earlier today that I found the damn thing."

"Come on, then." Simba hurried off. "I don't want anything else to happen while we're gone. There's no telling what Death might be up to..."

"So you believe me now?" Nala asked.

"Yep," Simba said, not bothering to look at her. "Who else is it gonna be?" He shot a warning glance at Haiba as he walked past him. "You'd better be right about this."

Haiba sighed heavily, slowly walking after the three, in no mood to run. It was quite clear to him that Simba was no longer going to be his friend. He dreaded what might happen if he managed to take back the Pride Lands... He would almost certainly be exiled for murdering Tama. Maybe even executed.

So why am I doing this? he wondered. *If you know he's going to get rid of you, then why do you bother helping him?*

Haiba didn't really know. It just felt like the right thing to do.

"It came from here," Sarafina said, looking around carefully as she traipsed through the jungle. "I'm sure of it."

"Sarafina, I highly recommend that you refrain from investigating this any further," Zazu told her. "You're turning into one of those pesky cubs. They cause nothing but trouble."

"Zazu, has it ever occurred to you how much Simba, Nala and Haiba have helped?" Sarafina said over her shoulder. "We'd be dead if it weren't for them."

"They just keep getting us into deadly situations," Zazu said. "Like now. Anything could happen while we're searching for them. That awful noise is already extremely worrying. It could be the cry of some hideous predator, waiting to devour us."

"And the lights in the sky?" Sarafina questioned, shooting him an unconvinced stare. "Were *they* caused by a hideous predator, too?"

"I don't know," Zazu mumbled. "It seems that anything can happen in this jungle—and it's only going to spell disaster for all of us."

"Which is why we need to find Simba," Sarafina said. "I won't be surprised if he knows what's going on already. Once

we're all together, we might be able to find that 'sickness' or whatever it is that Ugaidi keeps talking about."

"I feel sick just thinking about it," Zazu muttered. "If that cub is speaking a single iota of the truth, then I will proceed to worship those cubs and everything that they've done. It'll never happen. Not in a million years! Sickness, indeed..."

"You're going to eat those words, Zazu," Sarafina said confidently. "Unless you die in some sort of horrible incident, of course. I'm sure 'the sickness' would enjoy a light snack..."

AN: Some delightful humour from Sarafina, there. So, Virusi has resurrected the Pride Lands. But there's a pesky force field blocking the way. Dang it! How will Hago's staff help? It's empty, isn't it? Hmm... time for more theories...

Chapter 5: Chapter 5: The Rusty Staff

AN: Things are heating up. Just five updates to go from me, and we're very nearly finished with the second part of the finale. It's gonna go by so quick. I know it. Ah, well. I had a good run, didn't I?

Greg M 94: Simba being controlled is a very interesting theory... but is it true? Well, I'll just let it be a surprise.

anonymous13: It is quite ironic. Hago was such a deadly foe, after all... But he's long gone now.

Chapter Five: The Rusty Staff

Simba, Nala and Haiba were beginning to wonder if the jungle was some sort of prison. Other than providing them with accommodation, it had done absolutely nothing. Ever since deciding to live there, they had been attacked by creatures from the pits of hell, had their friends killed and were on the brink of death more times than they cared to remember.

Then again, their lives were like that anyway. It didn't matter where they were living; misery and death would always follow them. Simba had worsened this by deciding to become a threat to everyone else. He had to be one of the most feared animals in the jungle by this point...

"It was over here somewhere," the Interceptor said, brushing aside the large stem of a plant as he kept an eye out for Tojo's skeletal corpse. Once he located the dead cub, finding Hago's magical staff shouldn't be too much trouble. Then maybe they could break through that invisible force field covering the Pride Lands and give Virusi the punishment that he deserved. "I'm sure of it. Once I see that body, I'll know we're there."

"You won't have far to look," Nala sighed, feeling a pang of sadness as she spotted something a few feet up ahead. "Tojo's over there."

Only the skeleton of the cub remained, save for a few fragments of decaying flesh and blood-stained fur. This wasn't Tojo. This was a mere shell of the cub who once went by that name. The body might as well just disappear. There was nothing left of him now. Nothing at all.

The four of them walked up to the skeleton, observing it closely. Nala averted her gaze; it only made her miss Tojo and Tama more than she did already. She could have blamed Haiba for getting rid of her. But, in a way, it was Hago who was the root of it all. His plan had gone horribly wrong, resulting in Tojo's death and Tama's mind-shattering grief. It was his fault, really. Hago had destroyed them all. Torn them apart. Things could become even worse soon enough...

"So you *did* take the staff out," Simba confirmed, staring at Tojo's shattered ribcage. Some of his bones had already been partly destroyed by the original impact of Tama's attack with the staff, but the Interceptor had obviously done even more damage by removing it. "The way it looks, this body will become dust in a few days... What a waste."

Nala's depression could only be furthered by the thought of Tojo being reduced to nothingness. As if the cub would cease to exist. Now all they had were the memories of him... Nothing physical to celebrate his life remained.

"It's in one of these," the Interceptor mumbled, poking his head into a nearby bush. He didn't want to be worn down by the sadness of the three cubs. They all walked around with such glum expressions on their faces. The trouble and strife had completely destroyed their lives from the inside out. He wasn't sure if they would ever recover. "I'll find it in a minute..."

Once he discovered the bush that he was searching was empty, he tried another one instead. He didn't take down a mental note of where he had thrown the thing; he assumed that it would never grace his line of sight ever again. But something always managed to surprise him, no matter how crazy his life seemed to begin with.

"Come on," he hissed, fishing through another thick bush. "Where are you?" He just wanted to end this tiresome adventure and go back to hunting mice. He was sorry that he had ever asked for something interesting to occur; it had caused nothing but annoyance for him so far. *Be careful what you wish for*, he joked bleakly. *You just might get it*.

"You sure it was around here?" Simba asked, tearing his gaze away from Tojo's corpse to watch the Interceptor search through the bushes. "Or did you break it and you were just too scared to tell us?"

"I'm not afraid of anything, you little creep!" the Interceptor snapped, turning round to face him. "Now, you'd better keep that mouth of yours shut, or I won't help you at all. Do you understand?"

"You'll do as I say," Simba told him firmly, unfazed by the threats. "Because if you *won't* help us, then don't think I'm just gonna let you go."

"So it's blackmail now, is it?" the Interceptor retorted, sticking his paw into yet another bush. "Stupid cub..."

"That's just too far, Simba," Nala whispered in his ear. "You can't kill him."

"Why not?" Simba replied simply, shrugging his shoulders as if it were nothing. "He's not much use to anyone else. Especially after we get the kingdom back. There'll be no need for him to remain alive... Isn't that what you want? Another enemy dead?"

"If you're saying that," Nala responded, staring into his eyes, "then you might as well jump off a cliff right now."

"Yes!" The Interceptor finally detected something inside the bush. It felt cold and metal in his grasp. "I think I've got the staff! *I like it!*"

With the sound of quietly rustling leaves, the Interceptor removed Hago's golden staff from the bush. He held it up, narrowing his eyes at the thing. It looked quite old now, due to its disuse. Flakes of rust were beginning to peel away from its originally immaculate golden surface.

"Here." The Interceptor chucked it over to Simba, who caught it in his forepaws. "Still feels empty, though. I doubt there's any magic left—if it was even there to begin with. Looks like a fake to me."

"It's not fake," Simba said, turning the staff over in his paw. He felt slightly empowered just by *holding* it; he could see why Hago felt like such an important animal in the world. The staff had quite an alluring quality to it... "But I think you're right."

The staff did indeed feel quite hollow. It seemed that all the magical powers contained within the staff had been sucked right out of it. Simba mused that this was a result of Tama's final confrontation with Tojo... It was her fault that no magic remained, most likely. "There's no magic in it."

"How do you know?" Haiba asked, although he soon wished he hadn't. Simba would probably kill him for speaking.

Simba smiled. "Watch." He aimed the staff's cobra head at Haiba, willing with all his might for it to fire a magical blast of energy that would turn him into a pile of ash. After all, he deserved such an execution for murdering Tama.

Haiba cringed slightly, awaiting some sort of impact—but nothing happened.

"See?" Simba released the staff from his grasp, allowing it to clatter to the ground. "Completely empty. You brought us here for nothing."

"So that's it?" said the Interceptor, looking stunned. "We came all this way without some kind of backup plan? That's ridiculous!"

"Looks like it," Simba agreed, advancing slowly towards Haiba, claws outstretched. "You've wasted our time..."

Haiba knew that Simba wanted another excuse to kill him, but he wasn't afraid. Not this time. "Wait a minute," he said, raising both forepaws in an attempt to stop him. "I said we'd need help."

"But I thought the staff was the help?" Nala said, confused.

"No." Haiba shook his head. "You weren't listening to me properly. We need to fill Hago's staff with magical energy again. Then we can use it against that invisible wall."

"Oh, that's brilliant," said the Interceptor sarcastically. "None of us are magical, genius. Certainly not me. I prefer to hunt my prey rather than blast them with girly lights."

"Yeah," Simba said, still sounding thoroughly unconvinced. "How do you think we're going to fill the staff up with magical energy, hmm? There's no way that's gonna happen. You're just trying to stall for time."

"No, I'm not," Haiba declared. "I know *exactly* how to put some more magic into it."

"How?" Nala asked.

"The Roho."

Simba narrowed his eyes at Haiba. "Go on," he said, motioning for him to continue.

Surprised by Simba's encouragement, Haiba decided to explain. "Well, you all know what happened the last time with the Roho, don't you?"

Simba and Nala nodded, but the Interceptor just looked incredibly bemused.

"What the heck are you talking about this time?" he ranted. "The three of you are all insane! First, it's just the magic—but now imaginary friends? I give up..." He threw up his forepaws in frustration, turning away from them all.

"The Roho is a magical being who can grant any wish you desire," Haiba told him. "If we wish for him to rejuvenate the staff, then we can use it!"

"That's brilliant, Haiba!" Nala exclaimed, smiling. "It makes sense to me. What do you think, Simba?"

Simba glanced at the staff on the ground. "It's worth a try, I guess," he replied.

"I'm getting sick of all this running around," the Interceptor complained. "Where the hell do we find this thing, anyway?"

"The Dark Caves," Haiba said, instantly recalling the name from their previous adventure where they met the Roho. "It shouldn't be too hard to get in. There used to be creatures surrounding the place. We wished for them to be destroyed, though."

"Well, that's a relief," Nala said flatly. "Luckily, we only have to contend with a living virus and a destructive evil plot that could affect the entire world. Should be a breeze. Really."

"We'd better get going. I don't know how much time we have left," Simba said, picking up the staff with his teeth.

"This had better work," the Interceptor said as he followed the three into the darkness of the jungle. "Otherwise that living virus is going to be the death of us all."

"I don't believe what I'm seeing," Sarafina said, resisting the urge to rub her eyes. "This can't be happening."

Sarafina's search for Simba had led her to the outskirts of the Pride Lands. When she arrived there with Zazu and an unconscious Ugaidi, she expected to see the gaping hole where the kingdom once stood. However, things had quite clearly changed in the previous couple of hours.

The Pride Lands had returned. Sarafina didn't know how or why, but the kingdom was there. It looked no different than when she had been living there prior to its chaotic destruction. She couldn't help but smile at the familiar sight of Pride Rock. This was her true home. It felt like such a long time since she had set a paw on the grass...

"That's just impossible," Zazu said, visibly amazed by the sight of the resurrected kingdom. "We must be hallucinating."

"It's a miracle," Sarafina said, stepping towards the Pride Lands. "It must be. Either that or someone insanely powerful has managed to restore things to the way they were before."

"The name 'Simba' is on the tip of my tongue," Zazu muttered. "The cub obviously has something to do with this. These things don't just happen for a reason."

"You should have listened to me before," Sarafina replied. "And Ugaidi, too. Maybe this has something to do with that 'sickness' he was talking about." She glanced around to make sure that no one was watching. "We should go inside and take a look around. I want to know what's going on."

She took a few steps forward, but grunted in shock as she bumped her head on an invisible wall. "What?" She stumbled back, confused as to what had just happened. "It's... it's a..." She placed a paw against the invisible barrier, quickly deducing that no amount of force was going to break through it. "It's a *wall*."

"This is getting more and more ridiculous by the second," Zazu said impatiently. "Is it so much trouble to have your home back? Even when it's right there in front of you, someone always has to tease you with an invisible wall!"

"There has to be a way to get through it," Sarafina said. "Otherwise, how is whoever's inside going to get out?"

Ugaidi's eyes suddenly snapped open. "The virus is here."

***Chapter 6*: Chapter 6: The Rejuvenation**

Chapter Six: The Rejuvenation

Simba, Nala and Haiba still treaded very carefully towards the opening to the Dark Caves as they came into view. They were still afraid of some creatures attacking without warning and crunching them to bits... Haiba wasn't fond of being covered in drool for the nine millionth time, either.

Luckily, no such attacks occurred. Simba, Nala, Haiba and the Interceptor reached the entrance with ease.

"Okay, so what do we do?" the Interceptor asked, looking around. It was getting very dark now, and light was restricted. He didn't know how they were going to manage finding their way through the pitch blackness of the caves... "We won't be able to see in there, you know. It's way too dark."

Simba spat Hago's staff out of his mouth, catching it in one of his forepaws. "I'll handle it," he said, and scraped the rusty staff across the rough walls of the cave interior.

Thanks to the friction, several sparks flew from the end of the staff. They landed on a bunch of leaves piled up awkwardly on the ground, setting them on fire instantly. The interior of the cave was instantly filled with light, allowing them to see easily.

"That should do for a while," Simba said, placing the staff back into his mouth.

"Then we'd better get going," the Interceptor advised, walking straight into the newly illuminated cave. "It's nearly midnight. I bet satanic nuts like that virus love to start their plans at this time."

It took Simba and the others a little while to find their way through the passageways, twists and turns, but they eventually arrived at the hallway which led to the Roho. The fire that Simba had started by the cave entrance wasn't creating too much light where they were; the four could barely see each other.

"It should be just up here," Nala said, remembering her last encounter with the Roho. "Hopefully, we can get some more answers while we're at it."

"Hello?" Haiba called, his voice echoing across the cavernous area as he walked along. "Hello?"

As they reached the end, a blood red light illuminated the hallway. The four watched with confusion and alarm as the Roho slowly faded into existence.

"What the...?" Haiba found it hard to believe what he was seeing.

The first time the cubs had encountered the mystical force, it was a bright white colour. But this time, it was red. Like something had attacked it. Like something had gravely injured it. Like it was dying.

"Cubs..." The Roho's voice was frail and weak; it was clearly in a very bad state. *"Why have you returned?"*

"What the heck happened to you?" Nala exclaimed, horrified to see such a pure being in this way.

"I am... dying," the Roho said. *"Something is coming. In the darkness. It is... consuming... everything. Including me. Bringing death and... destruction. You must run. Survive for as long as possible."*

"We're trying to stop it," Haiba told it. "We need your help."

"No one can do anything," the Roho said bleakly. *"Death will spread throughout the world. None shall survive."*

"We know how to stop who's doing it," Nala said, yanking the staff from Simba's mouth. "You have to give this staff magical powers. It's the only way."

"You found the... the staff?" The Roho sounded surprised. *"It is one of the most powerful objects on earth."*

"I know," Simba agreed. "That's why we have to use it."

"Yes," Nala said, nodding. "You have to rejuvenate its powers. Please."

"I tried to... to warn you," the Roho said. *"But it all went so wrong..."*

"What?" Simba asked, stepping towards the dying entity. "What do you mean?"

"That cub ... he was supposed to help," the Roho explained. *"But it didn't work."*

"What cub?" Simba asked exasperatedly. "What are you talking about?"

"Ugaidi..." the Roho said. *"The Hermit of Hekima always said that giving a cub the power of foresight would make him insane."*

"You gave Ugaidi his powers?" Nala said, stunned.

"We knew that this was coming," the Roho told them, straining every atom of its existence in order to speak. *"The Hermit of Hekima and me. We could feel it. The approaching chaos... the apocalypse. The end of everyone and everything. We wanted to help you, so I gave Ugaidi the ability to foresee the future. It drove the cub insane, though. Made him think that he was tortured by creatures. When it was all my fault... all my fault..."*

"No way," Haiba said, shaking his head in disbelief. For all this time, it was the Roho who had given Ugaidi his powers? They thought it was something else entirely... "What would you do that for?"

"You were the only ones who could stop it," the Roho said. *"We could create powers for others—but we could never utilise them ourselves. So we used the cub to try and warn you. He would have been able to see the future with ease. That way you could come up with a plan to stop this madness. But it is all too late now. Every creature on this earth is doomed."*

"Roho... please," Nala said, holding Hago's staff up. "Just give the staff magical powers. The least we can do is try. If we go down, then we go down fighting. Please—do it."

"But you will all... die," the Roho said. *"My powers are fading... There is barely enough energy left for one small wish..."*

"Then grant it!" Haiba urged, standing right beside Nala now. His claws were digging deep into the ground, his heart pounding in his chest. His whole body felt rigid with tension. "Just give us a chance!"

A long silence followed. It seemed to last an eternity.

Finally, the Roho delivered its answer. *"Very... very well,"* it said. *"I will give the staff its powers back... but the energy required to do it will kill me. I won't be able to help you any longer. I wish you all the best of luck, cubs. You are our only hope."*

Nala jolted back in surprise as a white beam of light shot out from the Roho, hitting the cobra head of Hago's staff. She could feel the object slowly filling up with energy—but this time, it felt different. The Roho wasn't filling it up with bad magic. This was *good* magic. There wouldn't be any concerns that the staff might take on a diabolical mind of its own...

She fell onto her back as the beam of light ceased. Nala slowly sat up, staring at the staff. It was now gleaming with rejuvenated power, returning to its original golden colour. The rust and age had been completely eradicated. It looked just like new.

"Goodbye..."

The Roho uttered its final words, and blinked out of existence in a bright red flash.

Another magical force was lost to the world for ever.

"We did it," Nala said, gazing at the flashy staff, trying to focus on the positives. "That's the main thing."

"This is worse than we thought," Haiba said, looking very worried. "If it can kill something like the Roho, then that means it's more powerful than anything we've ever faced before."

"Death will spread throughout the world," Simba repeated quietly. "He's back. And I have a feeling he's coming. *Tonight.*"

"So we were right," Nala said, "and it *is* Death. He must have been planning this out for ages. Probably since—"

"Probably since I defeated him," Simba finished. "We have hours, at the most. That virus is obviously doing something in the Pride Lands that'll bring him back into the world. We need that staff to fight him."

"Hopefully, now we can break through that invisible wall," Nala said, turning the staff over as she examined its shiny new look.

"This is our only chance," Simba said, a determined expression on his face. "We have to find that virus and kill him before he can bring Death back. It's going to take all of our skills combined. Me, you, the Interceptor. Even... even Haiba."

Haiba felt ever so slightly touched by Simba's admission. It still wasn't enough to take away his dislike of him, though. A quick touch to his permanent scars was all that he needed to bring the hatred running back.

"I suppose I'm in, then," said the Interceptor. "I hate that virus as much as you do. If I have to rip his throat out, then I will. And I'll *like* it, too." He was more than pleased at the thought. Virusi had caused him too much trouble over the course of the day. It was about time that he finally got what he deserved.

"Then let's go," Simba said, striding back out of the hallway. He didn't look back at the spot where the Roho had perished. He didn't have time to think about those who had died. That could wait until later. They had a job to do now. "We can't wait any longer."

Simba, Nala, Haiba and the Interceptor left the Dark Caves with a renowned sense of purpose.

Their final battle was nigh.

AN: That's the penultimate chapter of the penultimate story done with. Never thought I'd say that. But I did. So, the truth about Ugaidi is out. The Hermit of Hekima and the Roho had a plan going on... Intriguing, hmm? I bet I've confused you even more, now. That's my job, though! See you tomorrow for the end of the second part!

Chapter 7: Chapter 7: The Pool of Evil

AN: This is it. The end of the second part of the finale. There's only one story remaining after this, you know. *The Lion King Adventures* is very nearly over and done with. So, don't let me keep you waiting. Enjoy the thrilling conclusion!

Haradion: Ugaidi could have been a very good friend. Sadly, the Hermit of Hekima and the Roho messed up. Now he's insane beyond repair. Talk about an experiment gone wrong, eh?

anonymous13: The Roho was there for a reason. It all makes sense now that we know the truth about Ugaidi, doesn't it? But that's not the only mystery left in this series...

Chapter Seven: The Pool of Evil

It was getting very late as Simba, Nala, Haiba and the Interceptor returned to the reborn Pride Lands. The full moon hung brightly in the black sky, providing some helpful illumination. There weren't as many stars out tonight, however. Usually, there were millions. But today, there seemed to be none at all...

"I hope we're ready for this," Nala said, staring at the restored land in front of her. They were so close, and yet so far away... That invisible force field was all that prevented them from getting inside and completing their mission. This was all they wanted. A home to call their own... "We don't know what that virus is planning."

"Could be anything," said the Interceptor, shrugging. "Regardless, I'm still going to beat the living daylights out of him for causing me so much trouble!"

Simba took Hago's staff out of his mouth, lifting it up in front of his face. Its golden surface was glinting in the moonlight; it looked so much better now that it had been restored by the Roho's incredible abilities. It didn't have such a sinister appearance, either. It could almost be considered as... *good*.

"I hope this'll work," Simba said. "Now that it's magical, it should be able to take care of that invisible wall. And if it *doesn't* work, then I know exactly who will pay the price..." He cast a cold, hard stare in the direction of Haiba. The cub shifted nervously on his paws, knowing that even if the staff's magic *didn't* work, then Simba could still blast him into oblivion with it.

"It's our only chance," Nala said. "You heard what the Roho said. Everyone and everything will die if we don't try to stop it."

"Well..." Simba cleared his throat, striding right up to the force field. He raised the magical staff high above his head. "Here goes nothing."

Simba slammed the cobra head of the staff right into the invisible barrier, immediately creating a million ripples of bright blue energy that spread out across the entire surface of the force field. The four of them soon realised that the invisible wall was made in the shape of a giant dome shrouding the entire kingdom. Despite the level of threat involved, it was rather extraordinary...

"Is it working?" Haiba asked, watching as the ripples course throughout the force field. There didn't seem to be any other effect rather than making it visible...

Simba pressed the staff as hard into the force field as he could. The eyes of the cobra tip were glowing a fiery red. And soon enough, the force field slowly began to turn this colour, too.

Everyone watched in amazement as the barrier was entirely consumed by fire. The force field was burning up within seconds, fading away along with the flames. Within seconds, the entire dome had vanished, and all was silent.

Simba, Nala, Haiba and the Interceptor stood there. They said nothing. Just stared at the vacant and peaceful scenery of the resurrected Pride Lands. Now they were free to do as they pleased.

"We did it," Simba said. But then he let out a cry of alarm as Hago's staff suddenly crumbled to dust. "What the heck just happened?"

"The Roho must have been too weak to rejuvenate it properly," Nala guessed. "I think you used up all the energy."

Simba sighed. "Great." He looked up ahead. "At least we can get in, though." He sighed at the feeling of the soft grass underneath his paws. He inhaled a deep breath of the fresh air, sighing happily. "Everything's the same as it used to be."

"It's like we never left," Nala said, plucking a blade of grass from the ground and allowing the wind to scatter it into the air.

She shook her head, remembering why they were there in the first place. "Anyway, we can't focus on that right now. We have to find that living virus."

"You're right," Haiba agreed, examining the nearby vicinity. But there were no viruses or ugly creatures anywhere within sight. "Where's the most likely place he would be, though? He must have a certain reason for wanting to use the Pride Lands to resurrect Death. There has to be something—or somewhere—important he needs to be."

"Where else?" Simba said, his eyes solely focused on one thing in the distance. "Pride Rock."

Virusi was laughing as he stood at the edge of Pride Rock, staring down at the ground below. "This is all going too easy," he chuckled. "I'm more than halfway there, and those stupid cubs aren't anywhere in sight!"

Below the famous rock structure, the grass below was peaceful and undisturbed. Although the location had been in quite a few situations over the past few years. For instance, Hago had once set the bottom of Pride Rock on fire, under Scar's insane orders... It hadn't ended well for either of them.

The living virus lifted up his magma-like claw. It was glowing with a furious orangey red colour. Virusi grinned, and plunged the claw right into the rough surface of Pride Rock. A hideous-sounding cracking noise emanated as a result, and a very sinister change began to take place.

The rocky ground below the living virus began to rupture. Cracks began to spread out all across the entirety of Pride Rock; they smothered the surrounding cliffs as well, turning the place into what looked like a living haven of magma. The orangey red colour could be seen for miles around...

The cracks of magma twisted around and groped everything surrounding the living virus. And yet they destroyed nothing in their path. It was as if they were only a decoration. A cosmetic change that would be appealing to the insane eye.

But, of course, they were really for a much more sinister purpose.

He laughed maniacally, knowing that nothing and no one could stop him—or his creator, for that matter—now.

The cracks had completely engulfed everything around Pride Rock. Right below the iconic structure, a large pool of magma was slowly beginning to form, reducing the grass to ash in a matter of seconds.

"It's coming!" Virusi yelled over the roaring noise of the cracks. *"Death is coming for you all!"*

"What the hell is going on?" the Interceptor yelled, unable to believe what he was seeing. "This is turning into one big joke. I'm sick of all this magic stuff!"

"Shut up," Simba snapped, staring at the magma cracks which were rupturing everything surrounding Pride Rock. "Virusi has started his plan."

"What is he trying to do?" Nala exclaimed confusedly. "He brought back the Pride Lands and now he just wants to *destroy* everything again?"

"I don't think it's as simple as that," Simba said, noticing that the cracks had suddenly stopped spreading throughout the kingdom like an ugly tumour. "This is something much worse than pure destruction."

"Then we have to find out what it is," Nala declared, hurrying in the direction of Pride Rock. "We can't take any chances with this."

"Exactly my thoughts," Simba said. "This is a fight to the death from now on. If anyone's too cowardly, then they can just leave right now."

No one turned around.

Sarafina was trying her best to placate Ugaidi, who was thrashing and groaning about at the sight of the cracks, which were quickly seeping throughout Pride Rock. Luckily, they seemed to have stopped for now.

"Run! Run! Run!" Ugaidi screamed, trying to get away. But Sarafina was a strong lioness, and she held the cub down to the best of her abilities without hurting him. "There is no way to escape the sickness!"

"What is going on, Ugaidi?" Sarafina yelled, trying to get through to him. "You have to tell us!"

"We never should have come here," Zazu moaned in despair. "I always knew my life was going to end in some sort of horrible ordeal... I'm going to sizzle alive!"

"There is nothing to tell!" Ugaidi yelled, trying desperately to escape. The cub was absolutely terrified. Nothing Sarafina could say was going to calm him down. His mind was far too damaged...

"At least that wall—or whatever it was—went away," Sarafina said, trying to look on the bright side of things. "We could go inside, if we wanted to."

They hadn't moved since discovering the force field, wanting to get a better idea of what was going on in the Pride Lands. They didn't think it was safe enough to enter the kingdom. Ugaidi hadn't stopped ranting and raging since waking up; something inside the kingdom was obviously having a strong effect on him...

"Oh, please, Sarafina," Zazu said, rolling his eyes. "If you think I'm going to fly right into that mountain of magma, then you have another thing coming. I'd rather die than kill myself!"

Sarafina sighed. "I wish you'd be a better help," she complained. "It makes me wonder why I like you so much..." She shook her head. "It's a mystery."

"Sarafina, you are a very annoying friend," Zazu said. "I wish you would do something *intelligent* for once!"

"This *is* the intelligent thing to do, Zazu!" Sarafina snapped, her eyes wide. "Don't you get it? The whole world is falling apart—and this is the centre of it all! We have to do something before everyone dies!"

"We need to look out for *ourselves*!" Zazu yelled, slapping both wings against his chest. "We don't have the power to fight against whatever despicable evil is residing in there! We're just plain old animals. This is too much for us to handle!"

"He's coming..." Ugaidi was sobbing now, as if he knew his end was nigh. "Oh, no—he's coming..."

"Who?" Sarafina asked. "The sickness?"

"No..." Ugaidi shook his head. "Something much worse..."

The ground around Pride Rock had begun to shift and move around, curving upwards so the surrounding area had turned into a large bowl that housed the massive pool of magma. The fields had now become cliffs. If anyone were to fall from them, then they would be incinerated in a matter of seconds...

"I don't know what the hell is going on," the Interceptor said, claws digging into the dirt as he struggled to climb the steep cliff, "but it's really starting to get on my nerves!"

"Just hurry!" Simba said, straining as he attempted to reach the top. "We don't have much time!"

"What are we supposed to do when we get there?" Nala asked, just behind Simba as the four of them scaled the cliff. "The whole kingdom is shifting around!"

"And it's so hot, too," Haiba said, feeling like he was burning alive. "It won't be long before we all fry!"

Simba reached the top of the cliff, holding on to the end of the steep incline as he stared at what was below.

"I said it earlier," he replied, smiling. "Use his abilities against him."

Simba, Nala, Haiba and the Interceptor gazed down at the immense pool of magma that had gathered in the crude bowl of rock below them. The fiery liquid was swirling and swishing around, as if filled with an inordinate amount of energy. The sizzling steam emerging from below made them feel like they were all burning alive...

"Look." Nala pointed with a claw at something opposite. "There he is!"

Virusi was stood at the tip of Pride Rock, his sizzling claw stuck deep in the rocky surface. It was obvious to them now that he was the cause of this horrific environmental change. Everything was burning...

Just like the last time, Simba thought, reminded of the Vimelea and how they had annihilated the entire kingdom. *Just like when my parents died.*

But the alterations didn't seem to be doing anything serious, other than shifting the ground around and creating the enormous bowl of magma. It didn't seem to be intended for utter destruction and chaos. There had to be a much more important reason than just that...

"So what do we do?" the Interceptor asked. "How do we use his own abilities against him?"

"Use *that*," Simba said, pointing to the magma pool below. "I don't think he'd survived being incinerated alive."

"If we can get across to him," the Interceptor said, noticing how far away the living virus seemed from where they were positioned. "Are any of us magma-proof?"

"There has to be a way," Simba said, eyes darting around the area. "There's *always* a way..."

His gaze fell upon something on the edge of the cliff, and he grinned.

There was a way after all.

A thick vine—unharmd by the magma—dangled nearby from a tree which was wilting over the edge of the cliff, almost ready to plummet into the boiling pool below. It was quite long, Simba noticed. And that was just what he was looking for.

"Simba?" Nala called, watching as he walked over to the tree. "What the heck are you doing?"

"Saving the day," he replied, yanking the lengthy vine from the tree branch and biting down on the end of it.

All right, Simba, he thought. This is it. Any last words? Yeah—I really wish I had a better idea than this.

Nala, Haiba and the Interceptor all gasped as Simba leapt from the edge of the cliff, swinging around in an arc using the vine. He sailed over the bowl of magma below, releasing his grip as he was just approaching Pride Rock.

With an angry cry, Simba flew straight into Virusi, his hind legs outstretched.

"What—?" Virusi yelled in surprise, as the cub kicked him full force in the stomach, knocking him flat onto his back. The two were sent rolling and bumping across the ground, coming to a halt by the entrance to the den where the pride used to sleep.

Virusi rose upwards, seething with rage at the sight of Simba. "You just don't know when to quit, do you, Simba?"

Grunting as he pulled himself to his paws, Simba glared at the living virus with hatred. "Just what do you think you're doing?"

"You still don't understand!" Virusi replied, spreading his forepaws out wide, gesturing to the magma all around them. "It is time! For his resurrection! The end of everyone and everything!"

"How?" Simba asked, shaking his head in order to clear his mind. That fall had obviously taken a lot of energy out of him... "Why here?"

"It's the centre of attention," Virusi said. "What do you expect? I took the Hermit of Hekima's soul. It's the purest in the jungle, so I'm told. But I used it for more... sinister purposes. I used his good soul and my dark powers in order to create the most powerful form of magic in the world. I have used all the energy necessary in order to finally bring my creator back. And there's nothing you can do about it!"

Simba stared down at the pool of lava, watching as it swirled around faster and faster, waves thrashing frantically.

"The lava..." he realised, staring up at the living virus. "He's coming out of the lava?"

Virusi just laughed. "It's too late for you now. Too late for *all* of you."

With a growl of pure rage, Simba lashed out at Virusi with his claws. He caught the living virus right across the face, creating three deep scars running down his forehead. They didn't seem to bleed, though. Instead, they were glowing with the same magma-like colour of his deadly claw.

Of course, Simba thought. He has no blood.

Simba attempted to go for his throat, but Virusi retaliated. He grabbed Simba by the chest and thrust him straight into the ground, close to the edge of Pride Rock. He attempted to stab Simba right through the chest with his threatening claw. The cub could only hold it away with both forepaws, using all of his available strength to resist.

"Can you feel the heat, Simba?" Virusi taunted, watching as Simba buckled under the pressure. His elongated claw was very nearly touching the cub's eye... Victory was in sight for the living virus.

"No..." Simba replied. "But you will."

He kicked Virusi right in the stomach, sending him sailing over the edge of Pride Rock and into the pool of magma below.

Simba watched as the magma swallowed Virusi up, and he was incinerated to death in a matter of seconds.

The cub collapsed onto his back in relief. "Phew," he sighed. "I did it... I did it..."

But the victory didn't last for very long, as the ground beneath Simba began to rumble. He was thrown about the place, and almost fell from the edge once more.

"What the heck is happening *now*?"

The pool of magma below was bubbling and boiling. The waves were so powerful that they were scorching the underside of Pride Rock.

It wasn't long before an evil chuckle began to sound, reverberating throughout the entire kingdom...

"He's coming!" Ugaidi was covering his ears in pain, screaming in agony at the top of his voice. *"He's coming!"* Tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Ugaidi, who is it?" Sarafina asked. *"Who?"*

"It's burning!" Ugaidi yelled. *"Burning me! Burning my soul! I can't take it any more!"*

Sarafina and Zazu watched in horror, far too focused on Ugaidi to pay attention to the evil laughs that could be heard across the Pride Lands.

"Ugaidi, what's wrong?" Sarafina demanded. "We want to help you!"

The cub was twitching, experiencing the most horrible kind of pain imaginable. Blood was pouring out of his eyes, dripping from his nose as well. Neither the lioness nor the hornbill could possibly imagine what he was experiencing.

"Ugaidi, please!" Sarafina said. "We have to know who's doing this!"

"It's... it's... it's—"

Ugaidi suddenly stopped, his entire body going limp. He lay there. Still. Eyes wide open in fear.

He was dead.

"Simba! What's happening?"

Simba could barely hear Nala's voice over the noise of the evil laughter. The pool of magma looked ready to explode and shower the entire kingdom with its deadly liquid. He could only stare, unsure of what would happen next.

It worked, he realised, eyes boggling with horror. *The living virus did it. He's coming back...*

The centre of the pool was rippling, as two paws emerged from the surface. They were tipped with sharp, jagged claws. It wasn't much longer before an entire body was revealed. Fully formed.

And exposed to the entire world.

"At long last!" the body bellowed. *"I am finally free!"*

To Be Continued...

AN: And that's it. The penultimate story is finished. That was another evil cliffhanger, wasn't it? I've just got to leave you in suspense. I'm sure you'll understand. It's not like I'm deliberately teasing you by refusing to reveal the returning enemy

yet, now, is it?

Oh, yes... You know what's coming next, don't you? This is it. The big one. The mother of all finales. The final ever story in *The Lion King Adventures* series. Be here tomorrow. It is something you *do not* want to miss!

NEXT TIME: The end is nigh...